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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001309

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KING ORDERS ANOTHER COMMITTEE TO DEFINE JORDAN'S NATIONAL PRIORITIES

REF: A. AMMAN 712

[1](#)B. AMMAN 981

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) King Abdullah has formed a new 26-member commission to delineate the goals for Jordan's development over the next ten years. The group is diverse and includes current and former senior government officials, civil society activists, business leaders, and significant opposition figures, notably former PM Taher al-Masri and Islamic Action Front leader Abd al-Latif Arabiyat. The committee is the latest in a series of royal commissions tasked with "defining national priorities" that have come and gone in Jordan, most recently the "Jordan First" campaign of 2002. It is unclear what form this "dialogue" will take; some contacts say the committee is just another diversion from making the hard decisions needed to realize true reform. End Summary.

ANOTHER COMMISSION TO SET JORDAN'S PRIORITIES

[1](#)2. (U) King Abdullah on February 9 ordered the formation of a new royal commission charged with setting goals and guidelines for Jordan's development during the next decade. Deputy PM Marwan Muasher will chair the 26-member Steering Committee for the National Agenda, comprised of a former prime minister, former and current ministers, members of parliament, academics, business leaders, women's activists, and a senior Islamist figure (see complete list in paragraph 4 below).

[1](#)3. (U) In a letter to PM Fayez, the King stressed that the drafting of national goals must be the result of a "profound dialogue that takes into account the contributions of all Jordanians from governmental and non-governmental institutions." The King said he expects the committee's work to be completed by September and that it should include a sound evaluation mechanism. He added that the government should be the "engine" in efforts to translate the national goals into facts on the ground. "Success," according to the King, "will be measured with tangible improvements to the citizens' standards of living."

[1](#)4. (U) Members of the Steering Committee for the National Agenda:

- [1](#)1. Former PM Taher al-Masri
- [1](#)2. Minister of Planning Bassem Awadallah
- [1](#)3. Minister of Justice Salah al-Bashir
- [1](#)4. Minister of Education Khalid Touqan
- [1](#)5. Senator and rapporteur of the Senate Financial and Economic Affairs Committee Rajai Muasher
- [1](#)6. Former Education and Higher Education Minister Mohammad Hamdan
- [1](#)7. Senator and rapporteur of the Senate's Administrative Affairs Committee Jamal Khreishah
- [1](#)8. Senator and rapporteur of Senate's Environment, Health, and Social Development Committee Aref Batayneh
- [1](#)9. Senator UN Assistant Secretary General and Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States at the UNDP Rima Khalaf
- [1](#)10. Deputy and President of Lower House's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee Hashem Dabbas
- [1](#)11. Former House Speaker and member of the Islamic Action Front's Shura Council Abd al-Latif Arabiyat
- [1](#)12. Chairman of the Jordan Radio and TV Corporation's Board of Directors and Director of the Center for Strategic Studies Mustafa Hamarneh
- [1](#)13. Senator and rapporteur of the Senate's Legal Affairs Committee Osama Malkawi
- [1](#)14. Deputy and President of the Lower House's Legal Committee Ghaleb Zu'bi
- [1](#)15. Deputy and President of the Lower House's Labor and Social Development Committee Musa Khalayleh
- [1](#)16. Deputy and President of the Lower House's Administrative Committee Salamah Ghweiri
- [1](#)17. Former Member of Parliament Dheeb Marji
- [1](#)18. Businessman Mohammad Elayyan
- [1](#)19. Jordan River Foundation Director General Maha al-Khatib
- [1](#)20. Women's activist Nuha Ma'aytah
- [1](#)21. Islamic Centrist Party member and women's activist Nawal Fa'ouri

- 122. Chief Editor of Al Dustour daily Osama Sharif
- 123. Information Technology Association of Jordan Chairman Marwan Juma
- 124. Academic Munif Hijazi
- 125. Businessman Fadi Ghandour
- 126. Director of the Family Guidance and Awareness Center in Zarqa Nadia Bushnaq

BARELY OFF THE GROUND

15. (C) The Steering Committee has yet to hold its first meeting. Committee member Hashem Dabbas told poloff February 16 that he had not been consulted about the committee before being named, but was simply informed that he would be appointed to a royal commission. Dabbas added that since the announcement he had received no information or guidance about the committee's work except for what he had read in the newspaper.

SKEPTICS HAVE LOW EXPECTATIONS

16. (C) Despite the diversity in the committee members' backgrounds and world views, some contacts are skeptical that the committee's work will lead to concrete reform. Former PM Kabariti told Charge that he viewed the commissions as a diversion from true reform and that maintaining security is still the GOJ's primary concern. Director of Polling at the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) Fares Breizat questioned the value of standing up the committee at this time, noting that numerous commissions in Jordan's recent past have convened to debate Jordan's needs, with little concrete result. He pointed to the GOJ-instigated "Jordan First" campaign in 2002, which brought together a similar grouping of individuals to produce comprehensive recommendations to deal with Jordan's social, economic, and political challenges. However, once the recommendations were issued, the campaign fizzled. Little action was taken to implement the recommendations, leaving Jordanians with little more than a slick advertising campaign and, for some, a bad taste in their mouth about the GOJ's true intentions, according to Breizat.

17. (C) The Jordan First campaign was preceded by still other commissions, including King Hussein's appointing of a group to draft Jordan's "national charter" in the early 1990s. Citing his university students as an example, Breizat told poloff that average Jordanians have tuned the government out, chalking up the latest commission as an effort to convince outsiders (read: the U.S.) that the government is doing something noteworthy while the people are convinced that it is "business as usual." That said, Breizat lauded the diversity of the group, and said he expected debate within the committee to center around three "priority issues": democracy, development, and human capital. He expected former PM Taher al-Masri and CSS Director Mustafa Hamarneh to champion the issue of democracy and political participation, Awadallah and Bashir to steer the group vis-a-vis development, and Tougan to lead the charge on human resources.

COMMENT

18. (C) Jordanian officials informed us in advance that a royal committee for "national dialogue" was coming. Yet it remains unclear what form this "dialogue" will take and how it will extend beyond the 26-member committee to local opinion leaders whom activists say are increasingly alienated from policymakers in Amman. We note that contrary to the recently formed ten-member royal committee tasked with realizing the King's vision for decentralization (refs), this team is more diverse and reform-minded. However, several team members, including Hamarneh and Ma'aytah, told poloff separately that they are reserving judgment on the government's intentions until the committee begins its work. The inclusion of significant opposition figures, including former PM Taher al-Masri and the IAF's Arabiyat, could mean that the King is serious about having vigorous debate or, alternatively, that he hopes to co-opt their views while putting on a good show.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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